

Art and Antique Dealers League of America, Inc.

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Re: CT Ivory Bill SB 294

Dear Environment Committee Member,

I would like to make a statement on behalf of the Art and Antique Dealers League of America (AADLA) as regards Ivory Bill SB 294, currently under consideration by your committee.

Cultural heritage is under attack. Donald Trump went so far as to say that the U.S. would attack cultural sites in Iran in retaliation for Iranian aggression. The world condemned him for this. Those items that filled those cultural sites are also under attack in a misguided attempt to stem the degradation of elephants in Africa. The AADLA does not condone the poaching of elephants, but the AADLA wishes to a) protect cultural heritage and b) fully understand why elephants are being poached. These two objectives are not mutually exclusive in the eyes of people who wish to outlaw the trade in ivory, but they should be.

All of the experts on elephant poaching point to two major impediments to resolving the problem. The first is land conservation, something that is difficult for non-African governments or groups to aid and abet. The second is consumption of ivory in the Far East, notably China, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Phillipines. This is not something that banning ivory in Connecticut will resolve.

The PR efforts being made by NGOs are misguided. They do not address the underlying problem of elephant depredation. Banning ivory in Connecticut sends a message to no one and is detrimental to small businesses that deal in cultural artifacts. As a material, ivory has been used since the dawn of civilization—the oldest known cultural object which is 35,000 years old, was carved from mammoth ivory. Virtually every museum extant that represents material culture has ivory in it. Ivory is integral as a material in man's cultural development.

Federal law permits free trade of antique ivory. We would ask Connecticut to honor this freedom and not try to curtail it. The laws established in New York and New Jersey have done nothing to save the elephant and this law won't either. Criminalizing this trade will not resolve any problems and only create more as regards enforcement. It is a lose/lose proposition.

In summary, dealers who know their business also know how to identify the items they sell. Dealers spend their lives understanding cultural artifacts—that is what they do. Some dealers might focus on netsukes (Japanese carvings) some might focus on 16th century European carving and others still on household objects from 19th century America, etc. All of these dealers will know a vast amount about what they are selling. They will identify its age, why it was made, what it was used for, who the probable client might have been. This knowledge is important and it will die away if ivory is banned. That would be a very sad day.

Thank you for reading this letter.